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SIKHISM



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What is Sikhism

The word 'Sikh' means a 'disciple'. A Sikh is a person who believes in One God and teachings of the Ten Gurus, enshrined in the Guru Granth Sahib, the Sikh Holy Scripture. Additionally, he or she must take Amrit, the Sikh Baptism.

Brief History

The Sikh religion was found by Guru Nanak, who was born in 1469 AD. in the village Talwandi, now called 'Nankana Sahib' near Lahore (Pakistan).

Right from his childhood his keen mind would not accept all the groundless rituals, superstitions and dogmas which were major part of religion in those days.

Guru Nanak and the nine Gurus who succeeded him, set wonderful example of living spiritually, while yet taking an active and secular part in the world.

The Tenth and the last Guru, Guru Gobind Singh (1666-1708AD) initiated the Sikh Baptism ceremony in 1699 AD; and thus gave a distinctive identity to the Sikhs. The first Five Baptised Sikhs were named Panj Pyare (Five Beloved Ones), who in turn baptised the Guru on his request – an event hither to unknown in the history of mankind.

Shortly before passing away the Guru ordained that Guru Granth Sahib, the Sikh Holy Scripture would be the ultimate spiritual authority for the Sikhs and the temporal authority would vest in the Khalsa Panth — The Sikh

Commonwealth. Guru Granth Sahib, the Sikh Holy Scripture, was compiled and edited by the Fifth Guru, Guru Arjan in 1604 A.D. This is the only scripture in the world which has been compiled by the founders of a faith during their own life time.

Guru Arjan also built the world famous Gurdwara — Darbar Sahib, at Amritsar which is the nucleus of Sikhism.

During the eighteenth century the Sikhs were subjected to various suppressions and persecutions by the authorities of the time motivated by communal fanaticism. They had to make supreme sacrifices to protect and preserve their faith and separate entity.

The Mughal Empire was on the verge of disintegration. The Afghans had started invading the country under Ahmed Shah Abdali. The Sikhs availed of this opportunity to establish their own kingdom which they ultimately achieved under Maharaja Ranjit Singh (1780-1839 AD). The Sikh Empire lasted for half a century and was annexed by the English in 1849 AD.

During the freedom struggle of India a large number of Sikhs kissed the hangman's noose, faced all the brutalities and braved the bullets and suffered long term imprisonments in order to liberate the country.

Although the Sikhs constitute only 2.0 percent of India's population, yet they have made a name for themselves in almost all walks of life such as armed forces, agriculture, sports, industry, education, medicine and engineering etc., through sheer dint of hard work and with a missionary dedication. Their adventurist and enterprising nature has taken them to almost all countries of the world.

Religion and Philosophy

The Sikh religion is strictly monotheistic, believing in One Supreme God; Absolute yet All-pervading, the Eternal, the Creator, the Cause of Causes, without enmity, without hate, both Immanent in His creation and beyond it. It is no longer the God of one nation, but the God Of Grace. That being so, He creates man not to punish him for his sins, but for the realisation of his true purpose in the cosmos and to merge in from where he issued forth.

**‘O my mind, thou art the spark of Divine Light;
know thy Essence**

**O my mind, the Lord is ever with thee;
through the Guru’s Word enjoy His Love.**

**Knowing thy Essence thou knowest thy Lord;
and knowest thou the mystery of**

birth and death’.

(Guru

Granth, P. 441)

The basic postulate of Sikhism is that life is not sinful in its origin, but having emanated from a Pure Source, the True One abides in it. Thus sayeth Nanak :

‘O my mind,

thou art the spark of the Supreme Light;

know thy essence.’

Not only the whole of Sikh Philosophy, but the whole of Sikh history and character, flows from ‘this principle’.

The Sikhs do not recognise the caste system nor do they believe in Idol-worship, rituals, or superstitions. The gods and goddesses are considered as nonentities.

This religion consists of practical living, in rendering service to humanity and engendering tolerance and brotherly love towards all. The Sikh Gurus did not advocate retirement from the world in order to attain salvation. It can be achieved by any one who earns an honest living and leads a normal life.

**‘He alone, O Nanak, knoweth the Way,
so earneth with the sweat of his brow,
and then shareth it with the others’.**

(Guru Granth, P. 1245)

Guru Nanak gave new hope to the down-trodden mankind to join his fraternity as equals. He is a creator of the NEW MAN in the New World supported by a New morality.

Riches and personal possessions are not hindrance in living by spiritual ideals. Sikhism does not believe in the maxim, “It is easier for a camel to go through the eyes of a needle than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God”. On the other hand the Sikh dictum is as under :

**“They, who are attuned to the Lord,
by the Guru’s Grace,
Attain to the Lord in the midst of Maya,
(i.e. Wealth)”.** (Guru Granth. P. 921)

Sikhism does not accept the ideology of pessimism. It advocates optimism and hope. The maxim, “Resist not evil but whosoever shall smite thee on the right cheek, turn to him the other also”, does not find any place in Sikh way of life. On the other hand it enjoins its followers :

“When an affair is past every other remedy,

it is righteous, indeed, to unsheath the sword.”

(Guru Gobind Singh)

Distinctive Personality

A Sikh has a distinctive personality. This distinction is represented by five symbols, popularly known as Five K's, because the first letter of each symbol begins with the letter 'K'. These are *Keshas* (long and unshorn hair), *Kangha* (a comb), *Kara* (a steel bracelet), *Kachha* (pair of shorts) and *Kirpan* (a sword).

People who wear a uniform and who are imbued with disciplined outlook, are better able to achieve unity of purpose and acquire a real sense of brotherhood than those who have set no particular standards. A Sikh without these symbols is a nonentity.

Those who cut their hair or trim their beard commit a breach of the Cardinal Rules of the Order, and are considered as 'apostates'.

Sikh Baptism

Amrit (The Sikh Baptism) is a must for every Sikh. No minimum or maximum age is stipulated for getting baptised. A Sikh undertakes to uphold the principles of its faith and Code of Conduct as prescribed by the Gurus.

Any man or woman of any nationality, race or social standing, who adheres to the principles of the Faith has a right to receive baptism and join the Sikh Commonwealth — The Khalsa Panth.

Sikh Code of Conduct

The Sikh Code of Conduct is known as "Sikh Rehat Maryada". It is based upon the teachings of Guru Granth

Sahib, the Sikh traditions and conventions. These rules are meant for carrying out the religious ceremonies and enforcing the discipline of the Faith in an uniform manner throughout the world. No individual or organisation, whatsoever important it may be, has no right either to amend these rules or to frame new ones. This power rests with the Panth i.e. the community as a whole acting through their Beloved Five ones (Panj Piare). Any rule which overrides the basic teachings of the Faith is ultra-virus.

All intoxications such as alcohol, tobacco and all its derivations; trimming of the Keshas, eating the meat (Kutha) prepared as per Muslim rites are forbidden. Adultery is considered as a sin. A Sikh should regard another man's wife as his sister or mother; and another man's daughter as his own daughter. The same rule is applicable to the Sikh woman also.

Woman in the Sikh Society

Woman is regarded as a significant part of the Sikh community. She receives the utmost reverence for her role in the family and society. The birth of a daughter is not considered inauspicious nor does there exist any custom like Sati — the burning of the widow with her husband's dead body on the funeral pyre. Rather a widow has a right to remarry if she so desires.

A woman is considered to have the same soul as of man and she has an equal right to grow spiritually and to attend religious congregations and recite divine hymns in the Gurdwara, Sikh Temple. She is also eligible to participate and perform all ceremonies including Baptism.

Sikh women do not put on Veil (Purdah). Dowry and divorce are not permitted. Wearing of clothes which expose

the body and breed lustful thoughts are considered dishonourable.

Ceremonies of the Sikhs

The important ceremonies among the Sikhs are those associated with Birth, Naming the child, Amrit (Baptism), Anand Karaj (marriage) and the Death ceremony. The most important among all these is the Amrit (Sikh Baptism) ceremony.

No special rituals are attached to these ceremonies. The only important aspect is recitation of Shabad (hymns) from Guru Granth Sahib.

The dead amongst the Sikhs are cremated and their ashes are thrown into the nearest canal or river. No sanctity is attributed to any particular river. It is forbidden to erect monuments over the remains of the dead.

All these ceremonies have a common objective, namely to remind us of one's relation with God. These are conceived as means to an end i.e. the union of soul with the Lord.

Marriage in Sikhism

Martial bond according to Sikh religion is a sacrament — a holy union and not a social contract.

**They are not wife and husband
who only sit together.**

**Rather are they wife and husband
who have one spirit in them.**

(Guru Granth, P. 788)

Sikhism does not believe in celibacy. Married and family life is considered honourable, natural and ideal.

**'O my mind, keep thyself detached
even in the household,
If thou practisest the Truth,
and holdest thy desire and,
doest good Deeds,
thy mind is Illumined by the Guru's Grace.**

(Guru Granth, P. 26)

The marriage of Sikh couple is solemnised by circumambulating four times around the Guru Granth Sahib. Each time a Shabad — Epithalamium, which is a part of the marriage service is recited by a Sikh priest who performs the marriage ceremony. The priest tells them to mould their conjugal relations as per the model laid down in these Four Shabads (Hymns).

The same ceremony is performed at the remarriage of a widow or a widower.

Fairs and Festivals

The Sikhs celebrate the following days :

- * The birth, Guruship and death anniversaries of the Ten Gurus.
- * The installation of the Holy Granth as the Spiritual Guide (Guru) of the Sikhs.
- * The birth of the Khalsa i.e. Baisakhi Day, which generally falls on the 13th of April each year.
- * Martyrdom days of the prominent Sikhs who died for the sake of their religion or in defence of the oppressed.
- * The days connected with the important events of the Sikh history.

The Daily Life of a Sikh

Every Sikh is expected to get up in the morning before dawn. After taking bath he should meditate on the Name of God.

**Rise thou early and meditate on the Name,
Yea, dwell on the Lord night and day;
Then, thou sufferest not sorrow;
and all thy woes depart'.**

(Guru Granth, P. 255)

The following five compositions are recited every day

Morning : Japuji Sahib, Jaap Sahib and Ten Swayyas.

Evening : Rehras

Night : (before going to bed) — Sohila

A Sikh is required to attend Gurdwara — the Sikh Temple — as a part of daily routine.

Sangat and Pangat

The two important features of a Gurdwara are Sangat— congregation, and Pangat — Community Kitchen, also known as Guru-Ka-Langar. This community kitchen is meant for providing food to all devotees, pilgrims and visitors. It is a symbol of equality, fraternity and brotherhood. It is here that the high and the low, the rich and the poor, the learned and the ignorant, the kings and the paupers, all share the same food sitting together in one row. This kitchen is run by the common contributions of the Sikhs. The institution of Langar (Common Kitchen) is instrumental in creating social equality among the whole mankind.

The Gurdwara

The Sikh Temple is called Gurdwara. In every Gurdwara the Sikh Holy Scripture, Guru Granth Sahib, is installed in the main hall, which is used for prayer and daily service.

Every person irrespective of caste, creed, culture or nationality can visit it. Before entering the Gurdwara one must take off his shoes and cover his head. On entering the main hall every one approaches the Holy Scripture and bows before it in reverence and takes his place.

Any Sikh, male or female, may conduct the prayer or perform the services

Services begin with the singing of hymns with the musical instrument. On special occasions, singing is intercepted with lectures, poems, or other compositions highlighting events from Sikh history. The services are concluded with Ardas — the prayer, which invokes God's blessings in granting peace, prosperity and protection to all mankind.

After the prayers a Shabad-hymn, is read from the Holy scripture and then *Karah Parashd*, a sweet semolina — pudding made from flour, sugar and butter is distributed to the congregation.

On each Gurdwara *Nishan Sahib* a flag of yellow colour, surmount with a *Khanda* — a double edged sword is erected. This symbolises the combination of temporal and spiritual aspect of Sikh life.

Each city or town has Gurdwaras according to their requirement. All of them have the same sanctity. There are some Gurdwaras which in addition to being a place of prayer have also historic importance. The five most

important Gurdwaras are known as *Takhats*/thrones or seats of authority. There are : Akal Takhat at Amritsar, Takhat Keshgarh Sahib at Anandpur Sahib, Takhat Damdama Sahib at Talwandi Sabo (all in Punjab), Takhat Patna Sahib in Bihar and Takhat Hazur Sahib at Nanded in Maharashtra. Religious as well as temporal injunctions are issued from Akal Takhat from time to time for the guidance of the community. These injunctions are known as *Hukam Namas* and have the binding force of Sikh Personal Law.

There is no such class as priesthood in Sikhism. However, the one who performs the daily service is called the *Granthi*. The hymn-singers are called *Ragis* and the singing of hymns is called *Kirtan* i.e. praise of the Lord.

We conclude this brochure with the following words from our daily prayer.

‘O God, give us light,
give us understanding,
so that we may know what pleaseth Thee,
And may all (the whole mankind),
prosper by thy Grace.

Waheguru ji Ka Khalsa,

Waheguru ji Ki Fateh.

(Hail God’s Khalsa, Victory be to God)

(Sikh Salutation)

Sikhism is a practical religion — a faith of hope and optimism. Its ideals form a large part of the more progressive elements in humanity today. It shows mankind how to lead a worthy and useful life in the world, which elevates it to the status of Universal World Faith. ☪

SIKHISM

– *Justice Choor Singh*

The noble ideals and principles of the Sikh religion founded by Guru Nanak Dev have been appreciated by many leaders of other religions.

All great religions deal with the relationships of God, man and the universe. And, like the religions of the West, Sikhism emphasises the belief in One Supreme Being, The Creator.

The Supreme Being revealed to Guru Nanak is the Indwelling Spirit which continually creates and sustains the universe, each moment of its existence. God transcends the universe but is present in every part of it.

From this fundamental doctrine flow a number of other beliefs. Sikhs believe that since God is present in every person, each person stands as an equal before God, regardless of race, colour, nationality or sex. Thus there is in Sikhism a religious basis for tolerance, freedom of conscience and social equality.

An important tenet of Sikhism is that man may improve his own destiny. Guru Nanak taught that God rules the universe by Divine Will. Yet, each person by his deeds on this earth can influence his fate. What we sow, that alone we reap. Thus man moulds his own destiny under Divine Will. One might also reason that this belief in individual

responsibility is a source for the Sikhs' energy and enterprise.

Another important concept of the Sikh faith needs to be emphasised. It is a religion which encourages people to strive for continual improvement. Guru Nanak taught that God is The Perfect One, and that man is not perfect but has the capability of becoming perfect.

The attainment of perfection, according to Guru Nanak, is by developing love for God. Through meditation on the divine attributes of God there arises in the believer a desire to inculcate those same virtues in himself. Thus he strives to develop the Divine within himself, to become like God and to become one with Him.

Guru Nanak, who lived from 1469 to 1539, the era in which India was just emerging from its medieval period, travelled widely, preaching his new Faith. He won a large number of adherents to his teachings. It was the beginning of a new religious fellowship which in course of time developed into a well defined new religious Order. Its chief doctrines were the unity of God, the brotherhood of man, rejection of caste and the futility of idol worship.

The term "Guru" when applied to Guru Nanak and his nine successors means Enlightener. The Gurus were not an incarnation of God, or God in human form. Sikhism does not believe in the theory of incarnation. The Sikh Gurus were ordinary human beings, but when they were blessed by Divine Grace, they became perfect and capable of guiding mortals on the spiritual path. The Sikh Gurus were not worshipped; they were treated with great reverence and men turned to them for instruction because of their wisdom and their high moral purity.

Guru Gobind Singh, the tenth and last living Guru of

the Sikhs, ordained that after his death the Granth Sahib (the Holy Bible of the Sikhs) shall be the Guru of the Sikhs. He installed the Granth Sahib as his successor and conferred Guruship on it. The Granth Sahib, compiled by the fifth Guru, Guru Arjan Dev contains not only the great writings of the Sikh Gurus but also those of many spiritual leaders, ecclesiastics and saints from all castes and creeds. Sikhism is, in essence, heartfelt adoration, devotion and surrender to the one God, the Eternal Reality. This is the cardinal principle enunciated by all the Sikh Gurus and other whose writings find a place in the Granth Sahib, the scripture of the Sikhs.

It is not the 1430 page volume of Guru Granth Sahib, but its contents, the *Shabad*, (Divine instruction), which is now the eternal Guru of the Sikhs and that is why they prostrate before it, in reverence to the *Shabad*, in the same manner as the Sikhs of the day used to do before the living Gurus.

In the Sikh religion, union of the soul with God is the supreme state and the bliss of it is indescribable. The Sikh way of life is the simplest way of attaining salvation. It requires the performance of duties to family and society. It also requires doing honest labour, sharing earnings with others, meditation, charity, cleanliness, selfless service and egolessness. Salvation or liberation can be achieved here and now while on earth, without forsaking one's ordinary worldly duties.

In Sikhism there are no rituals to be performed, no gods or deities to be worshipped and none is high or low. Guru Nanak advices:

Call everyone high, none is low born :

There is only one potter, God,

and He has fashioned everyone alike.

His is the one light that pervades all creation.

(GGS, P-62)

Sikhs worship God and nothing else. At a prayer session, they sit on a carpeted floor before Guru Granth Sahib, which is installed at a slightly higher level and sing hymns of their Gurus from the Granth Sahib. After that they stand before the Guru Granth Sahib with their palms pressed together, in a humble posture, and address God in prayer or supplication. Every prayer ends with the following request :

Through Nanak may the glory

of your Name increase

and may the whole world be blessed

by your Grace.

Sikhism is a way of life shown to mankind by Guru Nanak and the nine other Divine Masters who in turn succeeded to the Guruship. They were in direct and constant touch with the Eternal Reality. It is a code of discipline laid down for the Sikhs by their Gurus.



FOR PEACE AND ENLIGHTENMENT READ
GURU GRANTH SAHIB —
SECULAR, MODERN AND
UNIVERSAL SCRIPTURE
— *AS OPINED BY SOME WORLD SCHOLARS,*
PHILOSOPHERS & WRITERS

I have studied the scriptures of the great religions, but I do not find elsewhere the same power of appeal to the heart and mind as I find here in these volumes. They are compact inspite of their length and are a revelation of the vast reach of the human heart, varying from the most noble concept of God to the recognition and indeed the insistence upon the practical needs of human body. There is something strangely modern about these scriptures and this puzzled me until I learned that they are in fact comparatively modern, compiled as late as the 16th century when explorers were beginning to discover that the globe, upon which we all live, is a single entity divided only by arbitrary lines of our own making. Perhaps this sense of unity is the source of power I find in these volumes. They speak to person of any religion or of none. They speak for the human heart and the searching mind.

—Mrs. Pearl S. Buck, Noble laureate

Sikhism is a Universal world faith with a message for

all men. This is amply illustrated in the writings of the Gurus. Sikhs must cease to think of their Faith as just another good religion and must begin to think in terms of Sikhism being the religion for this New Age ... **The religion preached by Guru Nanak is the faith of the New Age.** It completely supplants and fulfills all the former dispensations of older religions. Books must be written proving this. The other religions contain the truth but Sikhism contains the fullness of truth ...

Guru Granth Sahib of all the world religious scriptures, alone states that there are innumerable worlds and universes other than our own. The previous scriptures were all concerned only with this world and its spiritual counterpart. To imply that they spoke of other worlds as does the Guru Granth Sahib is to stretch their obvious meanings out of context. The Sikh religion is truly the answer to the problems of modern man.

—Prof. H.L. Bradshaw

The religion of the Guru Granth is a universal and practical religion ... Due to ancient prejudices of the Sikhs it could not spread in the world. The world today needs its message of peace and love.

—Archer

Mankind's religious future may be obscure; yet one thing can be foreseen. The living higher religions are going to influence each other more than ever before, in the days

of increasing communications between all parts of the world and branches of human race. In this coming religious debate, the Sikh religion and its scripture, Guru Granth, will have something special of value to say to the rest of the world.

—Arnold Toynbee

Pure Sikhism (as enshrined in Guru Granth) is far above dependence on Hindu rituals and is capable of distinct position so long as Sikhs maintain their distinctiveness. The religion is also one which could appeal to the occidental mind. **It is essentially a practical religion. If judged from the pragmatistical stand point which is a favourite point of view in some quarters, it would rank almost first in the world.** Of no other religion can it be said that it has made a nation in so short a time. The religion of the Sikhs is one of the most interesting at present existing in India, possibly indeed in the whole world.

—Dorothy Field

For Nanak there was no such thing as a God for the Hindus, a God for the Muhammadans, and a God or gods for the outer heathen. For him there was but one God, not in the likeness of man, like Rama; not a creature of attributes and passions, like the Allah of Muhammad; but on sole, indivisible, self existent, incomprehensible, timeless, all pervading — to be named, but otherwise indescribable and altogether lovely. Such was Nanak's idea

of the Creator and Sustainer of the phenomenal world, and it was a conception which at once abrogated all petty distinctions of creed, and sect, and dogma, and ceremony. The realisation of such God shatters the sophistries of the theologian and the quibblings of the dialecticians. It clears the brow from the gloom of abstruse ponderings over trifles and leaves the heart free for the exercise of human sympathies.

—Frederic Pincot, British Scholar

The Sikh religion differs as regards the authenticity of its dogmas from other great theological systems. Many of the great teachers the world has known have not left a line of their own composition, and we only know what they taught through tradition or secondhand information. We know the teachings of Socrates only through the writings of Plato and Xenophan. Buddha has left no written memorials of his teachings. Kung fuzu, known to Europeans as Confucius left no documents in which he detailed the principles of his moral and social system. The Founder of Christianity did not reduce his doctrine to writing and for them we are obliged to trust to the Gospels according to Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. The Arabian Prophet did not himself reduce to writing the chapters of the Quran. They were written or compiled by his adherents and followers. But the compositions of the Sikh Gurus are preserved, and we know at first hand what they taught. They employed the vehicle of verse, which is generally

unalterable by copyists, and we even become in time familiar with their different styles. No spurious compositions or extraneous dogmas can, therefore, be represented as theirs As we shall see hereafter, it would be difficult to point to a religion of greater originality or to a more comprehensive ethical system.

—**Max Arthur Macauliffe, British Historian**

In Brahmanical Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism generations of teachers and commentators gave new shapes of religions and philosophical doctrines and sometimes changed them beyond recognition. The six schools of Hindu philosophy branched off into different groups of thinkers. The same process divided Jains and Buddhists into different and sometimes warring sects. The history of Islam as also of Christianity presents the same phenomenon of doctrinal disintegration. But Sikhism never succumbed to warring commentators; it preserved intact the heritage which Guru Nanak had left for it. None but a great and far-sighted founder can formulate doctrines capable of surviving the shocks of political and social revolutions for centuries.... His humanity is transparent in his verses The story of Guru Nanak's life and achievement has no parallel in the annals of this ancient land. It is not enough to call him the greatest of the sons of Punjab. He must be counted among the greatest of the sons of India. He was the founder of the last of the greatest religions of the world. He planted a poetical sappling which has blossomed into one of the

great literatures of India. He laid the foundations of brotherhood which has enriched our national heritage by struggle against religious intolerance, social injustice and denial of political freedom. History must pay homage to one who — in serving God — served his country so well.
—**Anil Chandra Banerjee, Professor of Guru Nanak Chair, Yadavpur University, West Bengal.**

The more I dug into the pages of Guru Granth the more I fell in love with them ... It is enough for us to take as it comes to us, to hear the lovely music in the truths he sang, to try to live the life of inspired service and practical devotion which he taught. For these things the world will always be in debt to Guru Nanak and to those through whom he spoke in the succeeding generations.

—**Duncan Greenlees, Theosophist from U.S.A.**

Besides containing the teachings of Sikh Gurus, Guru Granth, also contains the teachings of saints belonging to Hindu and Muslim religions and even of so-called untouchables like Ravidas, Kabir, Namdev etc. The treatment meted out to the untouchables by the high-caste arrogant class was immeasurable horrifying and inhuman and words fail to give the description. For example, they were not even allowed to enter the temples or fetch water from community well. This is only a negligible fraction of the scene. But the Sikh Gurus embraced them, ate with them and even incorporated their lovely, universal, divine and sublime teachings in Guru Granth Sahib. This classic

scripture does not contain any stories, histories etc., but only truth. And truth does not age, fade or waver. It will serve as a Torch Of Truth for all the human beings, for generations to come. Guru Nanak had gone to Mecca. Kazis asked him, "Nanak, according to you, who is great—A Hindu or A Muslim?" Guru Nanak replied, "without noble deeds both will have to repent."

